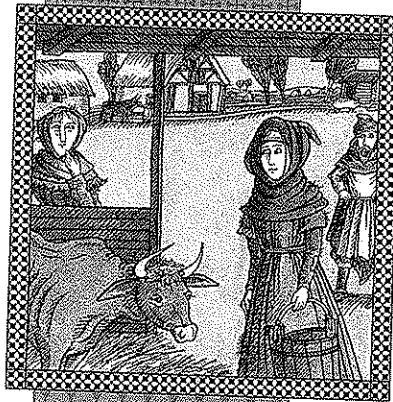


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MOGG

THE VILLEIN'S¹ DAUGHTER

¹ A villein was a peasant who wasn't free. He could be bought and sold like a slave. His house, his family, and his labor all belonged to the lord of the manor.

² Mogg's chickens suffered from "gapes," caused by roundworms. The roundworms block the trachea, so infected birds look as if they're choking to death.

³ On "can't lift his hand," the actress playing Mogg should lift her fist, so we know what kind of hand lifting she fears. Mogg's father is violent.

⁴ Villeins were bound by law to grind their grain at the lord's mill. The lord was entitled to a share of their grain or a small sum of money for the grinding.

My father died last winter —
also the chickens. Choked themselves² —
thrashed and turned sick, after all the trouble I had
plucking their grass and cleaning their muck
and not one egg. What was I saying?

My father died,
lay down with fever, and at first I was glad,
may God assoil me. "He can't lift his hand,"³
I thought, "while he's sick in the straw.
Not to me, nor Mother, nor wee Jack."
But then he grew worse. "Mogg," says Mother,
"you'll have to take the grain to the mill."

I took that great sack, but the mill wasn't turning.
The kingpin was broken. I waited eight hours,
knee deep in slush, to grind my meal
and give the lord his share.

That's the law. You have to grind at the lord's mill⁴
unless it's broken a day and a night.
I waited, cursing under my breath
till they fixed it —
they ground my corn, and took their cut.

MOGG

THE VILLEIN'S¹ DAUGHTER

Father died last winter —
the chickens. Choked themselves² —
flushed and turned sick, after all the trouble I had
looking their grass and cleaning their muck
and not one egg. What was I saying?

He died.
with fever, and at first I was glad,
boil me. "He can't lift his hand,"³
while he's sick in the straw.
me, nor Mother, nor wee Jack."
worse. "Mogg," says Mother,
to take the grain to the mill."

the mill wasn't turning.
I waited eight hours,
to grind my meal
bare.

the lord's mill⁴
a night.

their cut.

I trod home, with my shoes soaked
and my teeth chattering —
by the time I got home he was dead.

I prayed for him. He wasn't a good man,
always ale-drunk — Mother can only see from one eye.
He beat Jack, and the lad is a half-wit.
But he was strong, and canny with his pennies:
somehow he saved up enough for a cow —
Our Cow.

We call her Paradise — a good red-brindle
not six years old, and strong enough to plow.
Sweet-breathed, sweet-tempered, and bonny.
Jack and I slept with her all last winter —
her body was warm and her dung patched the roof.
A calf for the spring, and milk for the market:
Paradise.

Then Mother tells me: the lord has his rights.

Heriot,⁵ they call it. When a man dies,
the lord has the right
to the best beast he had.
"It's his right," she said, but I paid her no heed.
For sooth,
I could have killed Father for dying.

He came early.
A dapple-gray horse, and a ring on his finger.
Pinches his nose when he enters our hut.

*Heriot, as Mogg tells
us, was a widespread
medieval custom.
When a villen died,
the lord had the right
to his most valuable
piece of livestock.*

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Peers at our livestock, fishy-eyed.

I didn't say a word. I was staring
at the cow in the straw. Not our cow, but Tam's—
Tam Bywater's cow—
mangy, ribs showing, and breathing like
bellows,
a beast not worth the price of its hide.

And Mother is scraping and fawning,
"If you please, sir . . .
begging your lordship's pardon."
There's Mother, so meek, and blind in one eye,
her hair falling out, and her shift full of holes—
making a fool of his lordship.

So. He took the best of the pigs—
I'd have chosen the same, in his place.
We curtsied. Mother kissed his hand,
and we watched him ride off,
and waited till dark,
to take back Paradise.